

FBI Erred on Berrigan Musical 'Plot'

By Jack Anderson

The FBI failed to make good the late J. Edgar Hoover's startling charge that the Berrigan bunch had plotted to kidnap presidential advisor Henry Kissinger.

It now develops that the FBI turned in still another false alarm about a Berrigan "plot" to commit musical sabotage.

The G-men solemnly warned the White House that Father Dan Berrigan was conspiring with renowned conductor Leonard Bernstein to embarrass the Nixon administration. The alleged scheme was to dupe high officials, possibly even the President himself, into applauding an antiwar performance at the Kennedy Center.

The FBI warning, delivered to presidential assistant H. R. Haldeman on July 12, 1971, caused some backstage scurrying to make sure that Bernstein's production didn't contain a hidden antiwar message in Latin.

The confidential FBI message, citing a "valuable confidential source," advised that "Leonard Bernstein, noted conductor, has been commissioned by the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, D. C., to compose

music for the dedication of the Kennedy Center.

"Bernstein has composed a 'Mass oratorium' and reportedly visited Daniel Berrigan at the Federal Correctional Institution (FCI), Danbury, Connecticut, within the past three weeks and persuaded him to compose words for his music."

Bernstein's Mass "will follow an antiwar theme, will be in Latin and sung by a choir at the dedication ceremony," confided the FBI.

"Important government officials, perhaps even the President, are expected to attend this ceremony, and it is anticipated they will applaud the composition without recognizing the true meaning of the words.

Embarrassing Applause

"The source advised that the newspapers would be given the story the following day that the President and other high-ranking government officials applauded an anti-government song.

"The source advised that Daniel Berrigan had not completed composing the words, which when finished will have to be smuggled out of the FCI at Danbury."

Aghast, White House aides contacted Roger Stevens, head of the Kennedy Center, and

asked whether he had heard about the bizarre Berrigan-Bernstein plot. "They didn't want to be embarrassed," Stevens told my associate Joseph Spear.

Stevens immediately got hold of Bernstein who denied the whole thing. The FBI report, he said, was "a wild rumor."

Nevertheless, to relieve White House anxiety, Nixon aide William Safire was invited to come to a rehearsal. Another presidential assistant, Leonard Garment, attended a dress rehearsal at the invitation of Bernstein himself.

Bernstein's Mass was staged in September and was received with rave reviews. It contained only one line that could be interpreted as antiwar—"Dona Nobis Pacem" or "give us peace." President Nixon, in any case, did not attend.

The FBI's suspicions probably were aroused, according to Bernstein's manager Harry Kraut, by Bernstein's known friendship with Daniel Berrigan. They had even discussed the possibility of collaborating on a future production, said Kraut.

Bernstein did, in fact, visit Daniel Berrigan at Danbury prison. "They talked about the nature of Mass," Kraut said.

But they did not conspire to trick the President or anyone else into applauding unintentionally for peace.

Tax Relief?

Both presidential camps are furiously at work on tax proposals aimed at winning the support of the nation's aggrieved taxpayers.

George McGovern's advisers are talking privately about using tax credits to achieve a modest redistribution of income. They would like to shift some income from the top one-third to the lower two-thirds of the population by granting individual tax credits and taking it out of the taxes of the upper brackets.

The figure McGovern has in mind is a \$1,000 tax credit for each adult and a lesser amount for each child.

President Nixon, meanwhile, is contemplating tax reforms of his own. Aides say he would like to reduce the tax burden on home owners. This would bring tax relief chiefly to the middle classes, who hold most of the votes.

He is also seeking some way to ease the financial burden on parents who send their children to private and parochial schools.